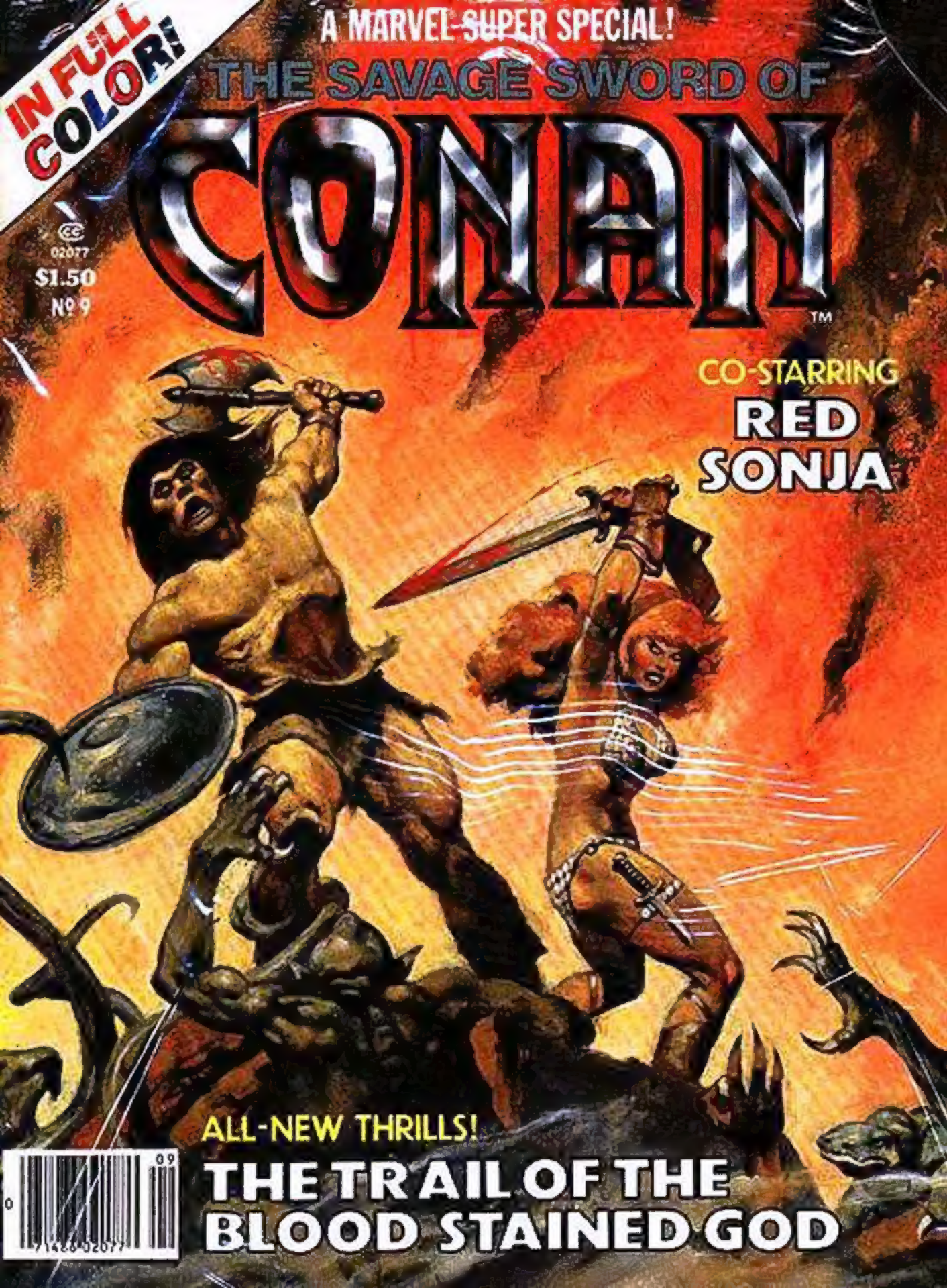
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A MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL!
THE SAVAGE SWORD OF
CONAN
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CO-STARRING
RED SONJA
ALL-NEW THRILLS!
THE TRAIL OF THE BLOOD STAINED GOD

Stan Lee presents

A MARVEL COMICS SUPER SPECIAL STARRING

The SAVAGE SWORD of CONAN

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THE HYBORIAN AGE OF CONAN

N
W
E
S

Western Sea

Isle of the Black Ones

Baracha Isles

VANAHEIM

AESIRD

HYPERBOREA

CIMMERIA

PICTISH WILDERNESS

BORDER KINGDOM

BRYTHUNIA

NEMEDIA

Belus

Gunderland

Galparan

Tauran

Tanasul

AQUILONIA

Tarantia

Black River

Bossonian Marches

Shirki River

Thunder R.

Khoratus River

Poitain

ZINGARA

ARGOS

Messantia

Meadow Cities

OPHIR

ZAMORA

Shadizar

CORINTHIA

KHAURAN

KOTH

KHORAJA

Nomads

Tundas

Deserts

Steppes

TURAN

HYRKANIA

To KHITAI

Vilayet Sea

Agbrapur

Xapur

Zaporoska River

Ft.Ghori

To VENDHYA

Kuthchemes

Zamboula

Deserts

River Styx

Khemi

Sukhmet

KUSH

KESHAN

PUNT

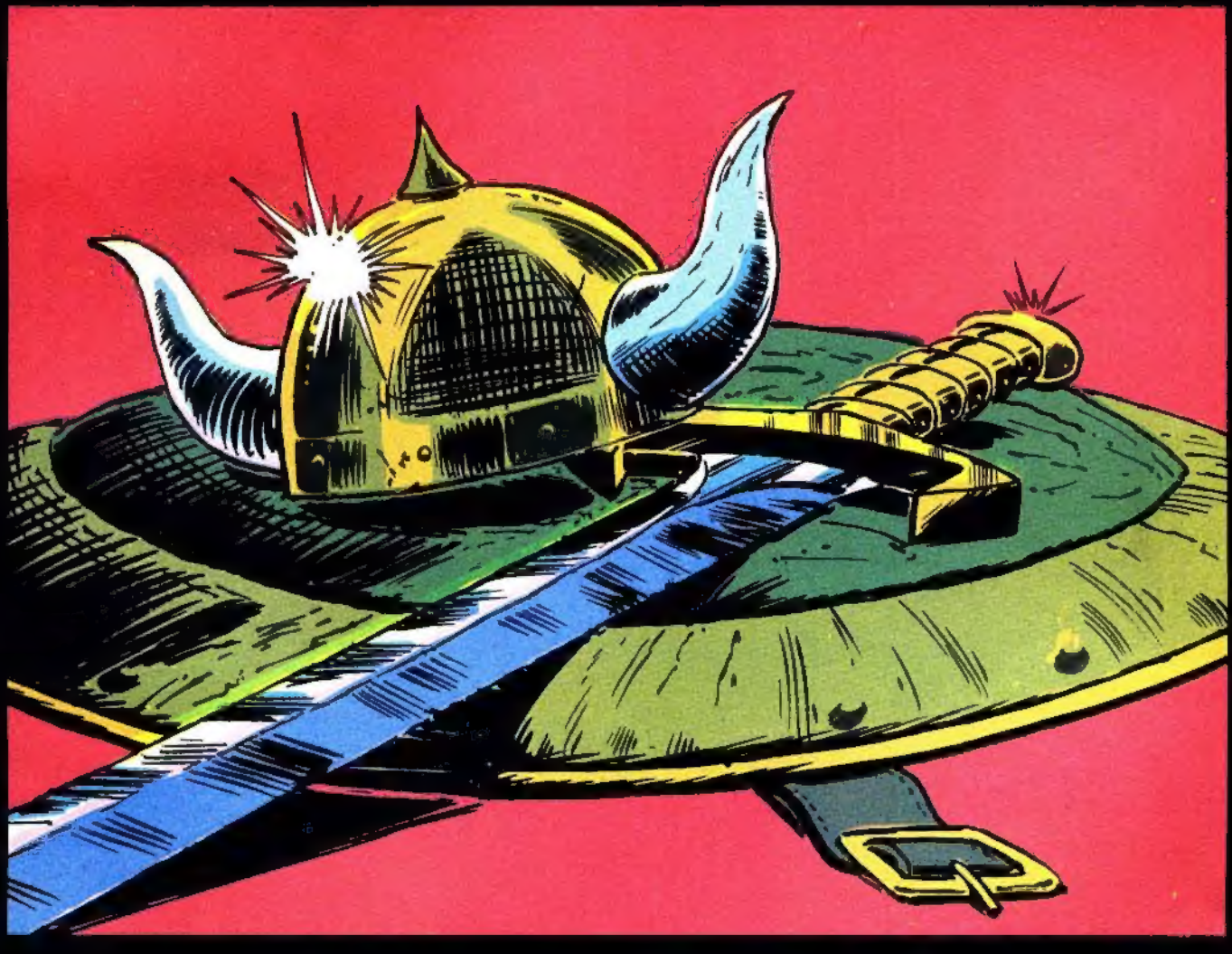
ZEMBABWEI

Zarkheba R.

Grasslands

"Know, O prince, that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the gleaming cities, and the years of the rise of the sons of Aryas, there was an Age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars.... Hither came Conan, the Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the jeweled thrones of the Earth under his sandaled feet."

—The Nemedian Chronicles.



Not long after he deserts from the Turanian army (as seen in the story "The Warrior and the Were-Woman," CONAN #38), the Cimmerian returns to Arenjun, Zamora's fabled City of Thieves, in search of a priceless treasure ....

IT IS DARK AS THE PIT IN THE STINKING ALLEY DOWN WHICH CONAN OF CIMMERIA GROPES ON A QUEST AS BLIND AS THE DARKNESS AROUND HIM...
...WHEN A SHARP, PAIN-EDGED CRY SMITES HIS EARS:
AAAAAAAAAAA
THE TRAIL OF THE BLOODSTAINED GOD
script: ROY THOMAS
art: JOHN BUSCEMA and TONY DeZUNIGA
Adapted From the story by ROBERT E. HOWARD and L. SPRAGUE deCAMP

SUCH CRIES ARE **NOT UNCOMMON** IN THE TWISTING ALLEYS OF **ARENJUN, CITY OF THIEVES**... AND NO CAUTIOUS OR TIMID MAN WOULD THINK OF **INTERFERING** IN AN AFFAIR THAT IS NONE OF HIS BUSINESS.

BUT CONAN IS **NEITHER** CAUTIOUS NOR TIMID.

HIS EVER-LIVELY **CURIOSITY** WILL NOT LET HIM **PASS BY** A CRY FOR HELP...

BESIDES, HE IS **SEARCHING** FOR CERTAIN MEN... AND THE DISTURBANCE **MIGHT** BE A CLUE TO THEIR **WHEREABOUTS.**

OBEYING HIS QUICK BARBARIAN INSTINCTS, HE TURNS TOWARD A **BEAM OF LIGHT** LANCING THE DARKNESS CLOSE AT HAND...

AND, AN INSTANT LATER, HE IS PEERING THROUGH A **CRACK** IN CLOSE-DRAWN SHUTTERS...

MOST OF THE MEN IN THE ROOM ARE **ZAMORIANS**... AND BETWEEN THEM, SPREAD-EAGLED, IS ANOTHER MAN... A **KEZANKIAN TRIBESMAN**, HIS QUIVERING BREAST **SCARRED** FROM TORTURE.

THE **TALLEST** OF THE MEN SNARLS A **QUESTION** CONAN CANNOT UNDERSTAND...

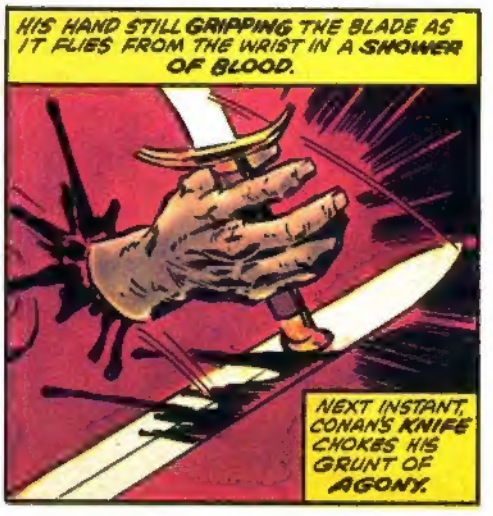
...BUT HIS ANSWER IS CLEARLY NOT THE ONE HE WANTED.
BEHIND HIM, A SUPPLE MAN IN A RED TURBAN LIFTS A GLOWING COAL FROM A SMOKING BRAZIER...
...TO HOLD IT POISED FOR A TERRIBLE MOMENT OVER THE WRITHING KEZANKIAN.
THEN, HE DROPS IT FULL ON THAT HAIRY CHEST.
GGAAA
AND, IN THAT SELFSAME INSTANT--
--CONAN LAUNCHES HIS FULL WEIGHT AGAINST THE SHUTTERS!
HIS ACTION IS NOT SO IMPULSIVE AS IT LOOKS-- FOR, AT PRESENT HE COULD USE A FRIEND AMONG THE HILLMEN OF THE KEZANKIAN RANGE... A PEOPLE NOTORIOUSLY HOSTILE TO ALL STRANGERS.
HERE, PERHAPS, IS HIS CHANCE TO GET ONE.

HE HITS THE FLOOR FEET-FIRST... SWORD IN ONE HAND, ZUAGIR KNIFE IN THE OTHER...
...AS THE TORTURERS, WHIRLING, GAPE IN ASTONISHMENT.
FOR A SPLIT SECOND, THE SCENE HOLDS, FROZEN...

THEN...
SLAY HIM!

AT RED-TURBAN'S COMMAND, A HAIRY GIANT LUNGES TO MEET THE ONCOMING INTRUDER, THREE-FOOT SCIMITAR IN HAND...

AS HE CHARGES, HE RIPS MURDEROUSLY UPWARD.


HIS HAND STILL GRIPPING THE BLADE AS IT FLIES FROM THE WRIST IN A SHOWER OF BLOOD.
NEXT INSTANT, CONAN'S KNIFE CHOKES HIS GRUNT OF AGONY.

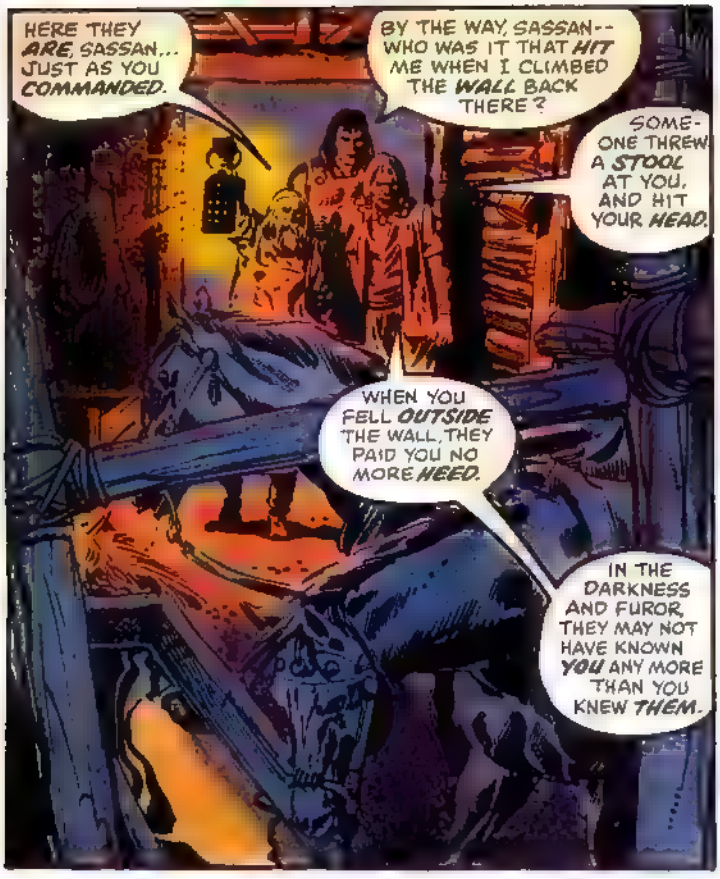
THEN, EVEN AS CONAN LEAPS OVER THE CRUMPLING CORPSE AT RED-TURBAN AND HIS TALL COMPANION...
CUT HIM DOWN, JILLAD!
ZAL-- HELP HIM!
THE CIMMERIAN, HOWEVER, DOES NOT WAIT TO BE SURROUNDED...
ARR
YYIII
...AND SOON, THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH MEN LIVING IN THE ROOM TO DO THAT JOB!
URRKK
THEN, EVEN AS JILLAD, ZAL, AND OTHERS WRITHE IN THEIR OWN BLOOD AND ENTRAILS-- CONAN LEAPS FOR THE MEN WHO STILL GRIP THE PRISONER!
TOO LATE DO THEY RELEASE HIM, TO GO FOR THEIR WEAPONS...
GET OUT-- AHEAD OF ME-- QUICKLY!
STUNG TO LIFE, THE KEZANKIAN STARTS--

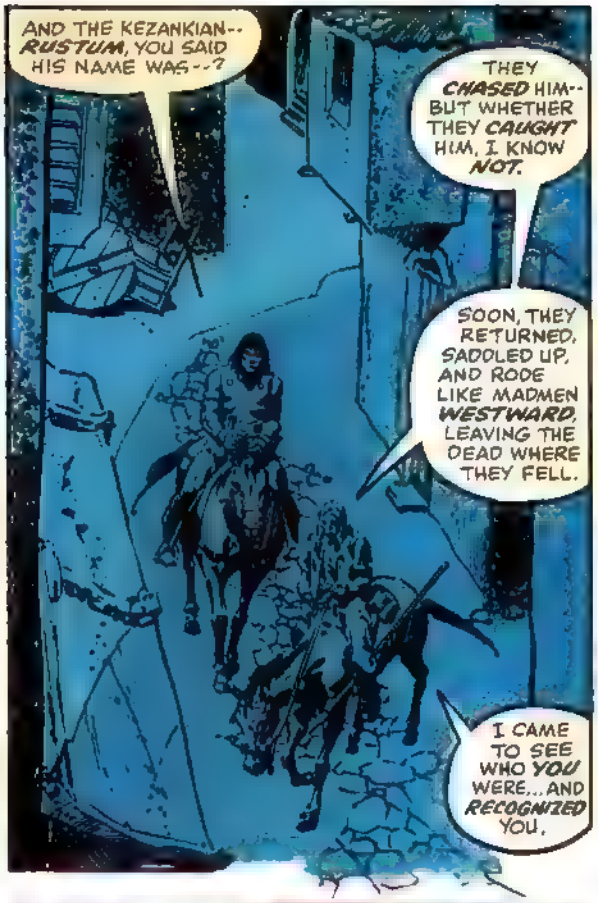
--SCARCELY EVADING A SWORD-SWIPE AIMED AT HIM!
THEN CONAN IS BETWEEN THE MAN AND HIS TORTURERS...
DID YOU HEAR ME?
GET OUT OF HERE--FAST!
DOGS!
DON'T LET THEM ESCAPE!
COME AND TASTE OF DEATH YOURSELF, RED-TURBAN!
THE KEZANKIAN, WEAK FROM MANY TORMENTS, STUMBLES ACROSS THE SMALL COURTYARD OUTSIDE AS CONAN LAUGHS AND CURSES--PARRIES AND THRUSTS.
THEN, AS THE SURVIVING TORTURERS TRIP OVER EACH OTHER, HAMPERED BY THEIR OWN NUMBERS, CONAN MAKES A HASTY EXIT--

--CONAN HURRIES TOWARD A WALL OVER WHICH THE KEZANKIAN IS ALREADY FAST DISAPPEARING.
HEY!
WAIT FOR ME, DAMN YOU!
SWINGING HIMSELF UP, CONAN HAS ONE GLIMPSE OF THE BLACK, WINDING STREET BEYOND THE WALL.
THEN, SOMETHING SMASHES AGAINST HIS HEAD--
--AND HE TOPPLES LIMPLY INTO THE SHADOWY STREET BELOW!
THE TINY GLOW OF A TAPER IN HIS FACE ROUSES CONAN.
THEN, THE LIGHT IS BLOWN OUT--
--EVEN AS HE LEAPS UP, UN-SHEATHING HIS SWORD.
BE AT EASE, CONAN OF CIMMERIA! I AM YOUR FRIEND.
WHO IN CROM'S NAME ARE YOU?
YOUR FRIEND.
CALL ME SASSAN.

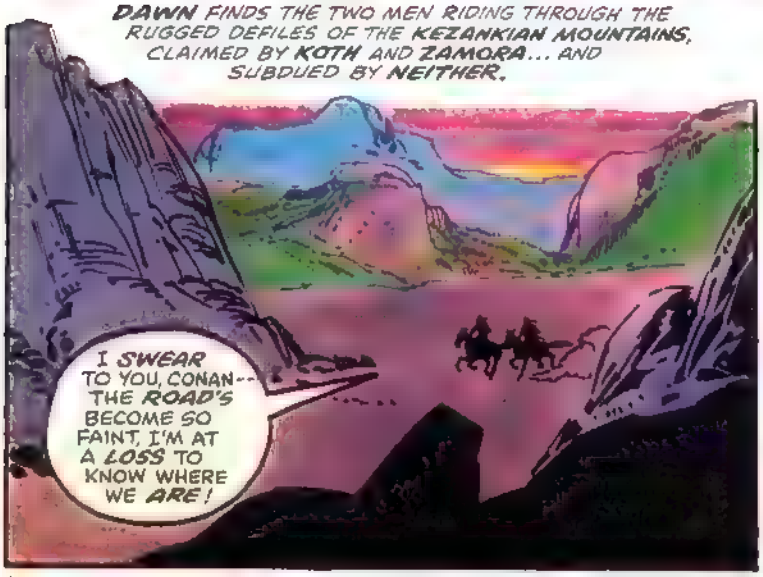
BY THE WAY, HERE'S YOUR KNIFE; IT FELL WHEN YOU DID.
YOU'RE AS SUSPICIOUS AS A STARVING WOLF, AREN'T YOU?
SAVE YOUR STEEL FOR YOUR TRUE ENEMIES.
SPEAKING OF MY ENEMIES -- WHERE ARE THEY?
GONE -- INTO THE MOUNTAINS, ON THE TRAIL OF THE BLOOD-STAINED GOD.
DAMN YOU -- WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF THE BLOODSTAINED GOD?
I KNOW THIS: YOU CAME TO ARENJUN FOLLOWING THIEVES WHO HAD STOLEN FROM YOU THE MAP OF A TREASURE GREATER THAN YILDIZ' HORDE!
I TOO CAME TO THIS CITY OF THIEVES SEEKING SOMETHING. AND WAS HIDING NEARBY, WATCHING THROUGH A HOLE IN THE WALL...
...WHEN YOU BURST INTO THE ROOM WHERE THE KEZANKIAN WAS BEING TORTURED.
HOW DID YOU KNOW IT WAS THEY WHO STOLE YOUR MAP?
I DIDN'T! IF I'D KNOWN THEY WERE THE MEN I SOUGHT--
HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW, SASSAN?
I KNOW THAT, HIDDEN IN THE MOUNTAINS NEAR HERE, THERE IS A PRE-CATACLYSMIC TEMPLE, WHICH THE HILL-FOLK FEAR TO ENTER.
THE KEZANKIANS FORBID THE REGION TO ALL OUTSIDERS...
BUT, A NEMEDIAN NAMED OSTORIO FOUND THE TEMPLE. ALL THE SAME, AND DISCOVERED A GOLDEN IDOL CRUSTED WITH RED JEWELS, WHICH HE CALLED THE BLOODSTAINED GOD.
IT WAS TOO BIG FOR HIM STEAL, SO HE MADE A MAP, INTENDING TO RETURN.
HE ESCAPED. ONLY TO BE SLAIN LATER IN A BAR-FIGHT IN SHADIZAR.
BUT, BEFORE HE DIED, HE GAVE THE MAP TO YOU!

YOU KNOW A LOT, SASSAN. HOW?
LIKE YOU, I WANT THE RED GOD-- EVEN THOUGH OF ALL THE MEN WHO HAVE SOUGHT IT DOWN THE CENTURIES, ONLY OSTORIO ESCAPED WITH HIS LIFE.
THERE IS SUPPOSED TO BE SOME MYSTERIOUS CURSE ON ALL WOULD-BE PLUNDERERS...
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT?
NOTHING MUCH. THE FOLK OF KEZANKIA SPEAK OF A DOOM THAT THE GOD INFLICTS ON THOSE WHO RAISE COVETOUS HANDS AGAINST HIM... BUT I'M NO SUPERSTITIOUS FOOL.
YOU'RE NOT AFRAID, ARE YOU?
OF COURSE NOT!
CONAN SNARLS HIS WORDS. YET, THOUGH HE FEARS NO MAN OR BEAST, THE SUPERNATURAL FILLS HIS BARBARIAN MIND WITH TERROR HE DOES NOT CARE TO ADMIT TO.
WHAT HAVE YOU GOT IN MIND?
WHY, ONLY THAT NEITHER OF US CAN FIGHT ZYRAS' WHOLE BAND ALONE-- BUT TOGETHER WE CAN FOLLOW THEM AND TAKE THE IDOL FROM THEM.
AGREED! "ZYRAS"-- THAT'S THE NAME OF ONE OF THE THIEVES WHO STOLE MY MAP FROM ME.
I KNEW THEM ONLY BY NAME, NOT BY SIGHT.
ZYRAS OF CORINTHIA, AND ARSHAK, A DISINHERITED TURANIAN PRINCE:
YOU FOUGHT THEM IN IGNORANCE AS JILLAD AND A MAN IN A RED TURBAN.
THE MAN THEY WERE TORTURING, BY THE WAY, WAS RUSTUM, A SPY OF THE KEZANKIAN CHIEFTAIN KERASPA.
WE ARE PARTNERS, THEN?
AYE! BUT I'LL KILL YOU LIKE A DOG IF YOU TRY ANY TRICKS!
HAH! I KNOW YOU WOULD, SO YOU CAN TRUST ME.
COME! I HAVE HORSES WAITING... THROUGH HERE.


HERE THEY ARE, SASSAN... JUST AS YOU COMMANDED.
BY THE WAY, SASSAN-- WHO WAS IT THAT HIT ME WHEN I CLIMBED THE WALL BACK THERE?
SOME-ONE THREW A STOOL AT YOU, AND HIT YOUR HEAD.
WHEN YOU FELL OUTSIDE THE WALL, THEY PAID YOU NO MORE HEED.
IN THE DARKNESS AND FUROR, THEY MAY NOT HAVE KNOWN YOU ANY MORE THAN YOU KNEW THEM.


AND THE KEZANKIAN-- RUSTUM, YOU SAID HIS NAME WAS--?
THEY CHASED HIM-- BUT WHETHER THEY CAUGHT HIM, I KNOW NOT.
SOON, THEY RETURNED, SADDLED UP, AND RODE LIKE MADMEN WESTWARD, LEAVING THE DEAD WHERE THEY FELL.
I CAME TO SEE WHO YOU WERE... AND RECOGNIZED YOU.

HALT! WHO SEEKS TO LEAVE ARENJUN?
OH... THAT'S ALL RIGHT, THEN.
MEN IN THEIR RIGHT MIND, THAT'S WHO!


DAWN FINDS THE TWO MEN RIDING THROUGH THE RUGGED DEFILES OF THE KEZANKIAN MOUNTAINS, CLAIMED BY KOTH AND ZAMORA... AND SUBDUED BY NEITHER.
I SWEAR TO YOU, CONAN-- THE ROAD'S BECOME SO FAINT, I'M AT A LOSS TO KNOW WHERE WE ARE!

I'M STILL FOLLOWING THEIR TRACKS.
IF YOU CANNOT SEE THEM... I CAN.

HOURS GO BY... AND SIGNS OF THE RECENT PASSAGE OF HORSES BECOMES CLEAR...
WE'RE CLOSING ON THEM, BUT THEY STILL OUTNUMBER US.
LET'S STAY OUT OF SIGHT TILL THEY GET THE IDOL.
GOOD! BUT LET US BE WARY!
THIS IS THE COUNTRY OF KERASPA, WHO ROBS ALL HE CATCHES!
MIDAFTERNOON FINDS THEM STILL FOLLOWING THE TRACE OF AN ANCIENT, FORGOTTEN ROAD...
I WAS JUST THINKING, CONAN:
IF THAT KEZANKIAN GOT BACK TO KERASPA, HIS PEOPLE WILL BE ALERT FOR STRANGERS...
YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN A PROPHET BACK IN YOUR NATIVE IRANISTAN, SASSAN.
LOOK!
EYES OF ASURA!
HALT!
BY WHAT LEAVE DO YOU RIDE IN THE LAND OF KERASPA?
WELL? ANSWER ME, DOGS!
YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT THIS LAND IS FORBIDDEN TO OUTSIDERS!

CAREFUL, SASSAN! THEY MAY BE ALL AROUND US...!
KERASPA CLAIMS A TOLL ON TRAVELERS; MAYBE THAT'S WHAT THIS FELLOW WANTS.
WE ARE BUT POOR WANDERERS, GLAD TO PAY YOUR BRAVE CHIEF'S TOLL. WE RIDE ALONE.
AYE? THEN WHO IS THAT BEHIND YOU?
EH? THERE'S NO ONE BEHIND US, I SW--
AS SASSAN HALF TURNS HIS HEAD, THE KEZANKIAN'S DAGGER IS SWIFT--
--BUT CONAN'S SWORD IS QUICKER STILL!
AS HIS DAGGER WHIRLS AWAY, THE CHALLENGER CATCHES AT HIS SWORD.
BUT, BEFORE HE CAN PULL THE BLADE FREE--
--CONAN STRIKES AGAIN!
RIDE FOR THE GORGE, SASSAN--

IT'S AN AMBUSH!
EVEN AS CONAN SHOUTS, THERE COMES THE FLAT SNAP OF BOWS--THE WHISTLE OF ARROWS--
--AND SASSAN'S MOUNT LEAPS AS A SHAFT STRIKES IT IN THE NECK!
CONAN! I-- CAN'T CONTROL IT--!
IT'S BOLTING--FOR THE MOUTH OF THE DEFILE--!
I'M COMING, SASSAN!
THEN, AS THEY SWEEP TOWARD THE HEAD OF THE GORGE, A TRIO OF HORSEMEN RIDE OUT, SWINGING BROAD-BLADED TULWARS--!
HAI!
SASSAN, ABANDONING HIS EFFORTS TO CHECK HIS MADDENED STEED, DRIVES HIS LANCE AT THE NEAREST--

--TRANSFIXING THE MAN, AND HURLING HIM FROM HIS SADDLE!
AAIEE
NEXT MOMENT, CONAN HIMSELF IS EVEN WITH A SECOND SWORDSMAN BROADSWORD AGAINST TULWAR!
THE CIMMERIAN, RISING IN HIS STIRRUPS, SMITES DOWN WITH ALL HIS IMMENSE STRENGTH--
--BEATING DOWN THE TULWAR, AND SPLITTING THE SKULL OF THE WIELDER--
ARRKK
--EVEN AS, SOME DISTANCE AWAY, SASSAN'S WOUNDED HORSE STUMBLES AND GOES DOWN, AS THE ARROW IN ITS NECK FINALLY TAKES ITS TOLL!
DAMN!

HERE, SASSAN!
GET UP BEHIND ME!!
MY THANKS, CONAN, I'LL-- NEVER FORGET THIS!
NOT TILL WE'VE FOUND THE TREASURE ANYWAY, EH?
THAT KEZANKIAN SPY MUST HAVE GOTTEN BACK TO KERASPA.
THEY WANT BLOOD, NOT GOLD.
DO YOU SUPPOSE THEY'VE WIPED OUT ZYRAS?
HE MIGHT HAVE PASSED BY BEFORE THEY SET UP THEIR AMBUSH-- OR THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING HIM WHEN THEY TURNED TO TRAP US.
I THINK HE'S STILL AHEAD OF US.
I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT-- FOR THE SAKE OF OUR PURSES.
JUST THEN, THEY COME OUT INTO A NATURAL BOWL WALLED BY SHEER CLIFFS.
FROM THE MIDST OF THIS BOWL, A SLOPE LEADS UP TO A BOTTLENECK PASS ON THE OTHER SIDE.
CONAN SEES THAT A LOW STONE WALL CLOSES THE GUT OF THE PASS...
CROM, MAN-- THIS IS A GOOD PLACE FOR ANOTHER--
--AMBUSH!
STRUCK IN THE CHEST BY THE FIRST OF A FLIGHT OF ARROWS, CONAN'S MOUNT LURCHES TO A THUNDERING FALL--

--AS CONAN AND SASSAN, JUMPING CLEAR, ROLL BEHIND A CLUSTER OF ROCKS, AS MORE ARROWS SPLINTER AGAINST BOULDERS--
--OR STICK QUIVERING IN THE EARTH!
WELL... WE'VE FOUND ZYRAS AND ARSHAK!
IN AN INSTANT, THEY'LL RUSH US...
...AND KERASPA WILL COME UP BEHIND US TO CLOSE THE TRAP.
COME OUT AND GET SHOT, CURS!
WHO'S THE ZUAGIR WITH YOU, SASSAN?
I THOUGHT I HAD BRAINED HIM LAST NIGHT!
MY NAME IS CONAN!
I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN! WELL, WE HAVE YOU NOW!
FOOL! A HUNDRED KEZANKIANS ARE CHASING US!
DO YOU THINK HE'LL LET YOU GO, AFTER YOU TORTURED ONE OF HIS MEN?
HE'S TELLING THE TRUTH, ARSHAK!
DON'T YOU HEAR THE SHOUTS AND HOOFBEATS COMING?
YOU'D BETTER LET US JOIN YOU--
--OR WE'RE ALL DEAD MEN!!

THEN, AS THE GORGE REVERBERATES WITH THE SOUNDS OF THE COMING HORDE--
GET IN, QUICKLY!
TIME ENOUGH TO DIVIDE THE IDOL IF WE GET OUT OF THIS ALIVE!
ALREADY CONAN KNOWS THAT HIS PARTNER SASSAN WILL STAB HIM IN THE BACK, GIVEN HALF A CHANCE.
NOW, CONAN ADDS ARSHAK, ZYRAS, AND THEIR THREE HENCHMEN TO THE LIST.
BUT, WHAT CHOICE DOES A DESPERATE CIMMERIAN HAVE?
FOR, NO SOONER HAVE THE PAIR JOINED THE FIVE BRIGANDS--
--THAN A SCORE OF KEZANKIANS THUNDER TO THE ATTACK, ON STEEDS THAT KICK UP ENOUGH DUST FOR FIVE TIMES THAT MANY!
THEIR QUARRY, HOWEVER-- BOTH NEW AND KNOWN ARE WAITING FOR THEM WITH A VOLLEY OF ARROWS--

--WHICH SWISH AMONG THEM LIKE ERRANT WINDS OF DEATH!
SOME OF THE KEZANKIANS SHOOT BACK, AT SUCH TARGETS AS THEY SEE--
--BUT, IN A MOMENT, THEY RETREAT OUT OF RANGE, AS THE ROCK WALL IS TOO HIGH TO BE CARRIED BY A MOUNTED CHARGE.
THEY MUST HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING US.
YOU LIED, CONAN! THAT IS NO HUNDRED MEN!
ENOUGH TO CUT OUR THROATS, THOUGH.
AND KERASPA CAN SEND FOR REINFORCEMENTS WHENEVER THE MOOD STRIKES HIM.
THEN, AT THEIR LEADERS' COMMAND, THE ZAMORIANS SAVE THEIR ARROWS FOR THE RUSH.
IT IS NOT LONG IN COMING.

LOOSE YOUR ARROWS!
AT ZYRAS' WORD, A HAIL OF ARROWS PLUNGES INTO THE MASS OF KEZANKIANS-- AND SEVERAL WRITHING FIGURES ARE LEFT BEHIND ON THE SLOPE..
BUT, THE REST COME ON, EYES GLARING AND BLADES GLITTERING IN HAIRY FISTS!
HAVING SHOT THEIR LAST ARROWS, THE DEFENDERS RISE UP BEHIND THE ROCK WALL, DRAWING THEIR SWORDS.
THE FOREMOST OF THE HILLMEN IS HEADLESS BEFORE HE CAN CROSS SWORDS WITH HIS CIMMERIAN TARGET--
ALONG THE BARRIER SOUNDS THE SMASH OF BONE-BREAKING BLOWS-- THE RASP AND SLITHER OF STEEL--THE GASPING OATHS OF DYING MEN.
--AND SASSAN IS DEADLY ENOUGH, IN HIS OWN WAY, WITH HIS THRUSTING SPEAR.
ONE OF THE KEZANKIANS, SOMEHOW, MANAGES TO REACH AN OUTCROPPING OF WALL ABOVE THE DEATH-DEALING BARBARIAN..

AS HE LEAPS, HOWEVER, HE CANNOT SUPPRESS A WARLIKE HOWL WHICH LEAPS UNBIDDEN TO HIS LIPS--
--TO BE INSTANTLY TRANSFORMED INTO AN INARTICULATE DEATH-GURGLE!
KEEP FIGHTING, LADS!
WE'RE KILLING THEM FASTER THAN THEY'RE KILLING US!
THEN, EVEN AS HE LASHES OUT ANEW, CONAN SENSES THAT THE PRESSURE HAS SLACKENED...
...AND, MOMENTS LATER, THE FEW REMAINING KEZANKIANS ARE STAGGERING DOWN THE SLOPE, ALL STREAMING BLOOD.
THERE IS BLOOD HIGHER UP, AS WELL.

THE THREE ZAMORIANS ARE DEAD, AND ARSHAK--
BORN...IN A PALACE... AND DYING BEHIND A ROCK WALL!
NO MATTER... IT IS FATE.
THERE IS... A CURSE ON THE TREASURE.
ALL MEN... WHO RODE ON THE TRAIL...OF THE BLOOD-STAINED GOD...
HAVE
DIED!!
INCLUDING ARSHAK, IT SEEMS.
I SAW KERASPA SNEAKING OFF!
HE'LL SOON HAVE THE WHOLE TRIBE ON OUR TRAIL.
LET'S MAKE A RACE OF IT: GET THE IDOL AND DRAG IT OUT OF THE MOUNTAINS BEFORE HE CATCHES US!
THERE'S ENOUGH TREASURE FOR ALL!
TRUE-- BUT GIVE ME BACK MY MAP BEFORE WE START!
I'LL BE DAMNED IF I WILL!
YOU'LL BE DEAD IF YOU DON'T!
HERE, CURSE YOU BOTH!
BUT I STILL SAY I DESERVE A FULL THIRD OF THE TREASURE!
ALL RIGHT-- I'LL NOT HOLD A GRUDGE.
YOU'RE A SWINE, ZYRAS-- BUT IF YOU PLAY FAIR WITH US, WE'LL DO THE SAME-- EH, SASSAN?
SASSAN NODS, AS HE GATHERS UP A QUIVERFUL OF ARROWS.

PART II

the IDOL AND the ABYSS

MOUNTING THE BEST HORSES OF ZYRAS' PARTY, THE THREE MEN LEAD THE OTHERS... UP THE CANYON BEHIND THE PASS.
NIGHT FALLS... BUT WITH KERASPA BEHIND THEM, THEY PUSH RECKLESSLY ON.
CONAN WATCHES HIS COMPANIONS LIKE A HAWK.
THE MOST DANGEROUS TIME WILL COME WHEN THEY HAVE SECURED THE GOLDEN STATUE, AND NO LONGER NEED EACH OTHER'S HELP.
THEN, ZYRAS AND SASSAN MIGHT CONSPIRE TO MURDER CONAN-- OR, ONE OF THEM MIGHT APPROACH HIM WITH A PLAN TO SLAY THE THIRD MAN.
TOUGH AND RUTHLESS THOUGH THE CIMMERIAN IS, HIS BARBARIC CODE OF HONOR WILL NOT LET HIM BE THE FIRST TO TRY TREACHERY.

HE WONDERS, TOO, WHAT **OSTORIO**, THE MAP'S **MAKER**, WAS TRYING TO TELL HIM JUST BEFORE HE **DIED**, SOME TIME BEFORE.

DEATH HAD COME UPON OSTORIO IN THE MIDST OF A **DESCRIPTION** OF THE THE TEMPLE, WITH A **GUSH** OF **BLOOD** FROM HIS MOUTH.

THE NEMEDIAN HAD BEEN ABOUT TO **WARN** HIM OF SOMETHING, HE THINKS.

BUT OF **WHAT**?

DAWN BREAKS AS THEY COME OUT OF A **NARROW GORGE** INTO A **STEEP-WALLED VALLEY.**

THE **DEFILE** THROUGH WHICH THEY HAVE ENTERED IS THE **ONLY WAY IN.**

IT COMES OUT UPON A **LEDGE**, WITH THE CLIFF RISING A BOWSHOT **ABOVE** IT ON ONE SIDE, AND FALLING AWAY TO AN IMMEASURABLE **DEPTH** BELOW.

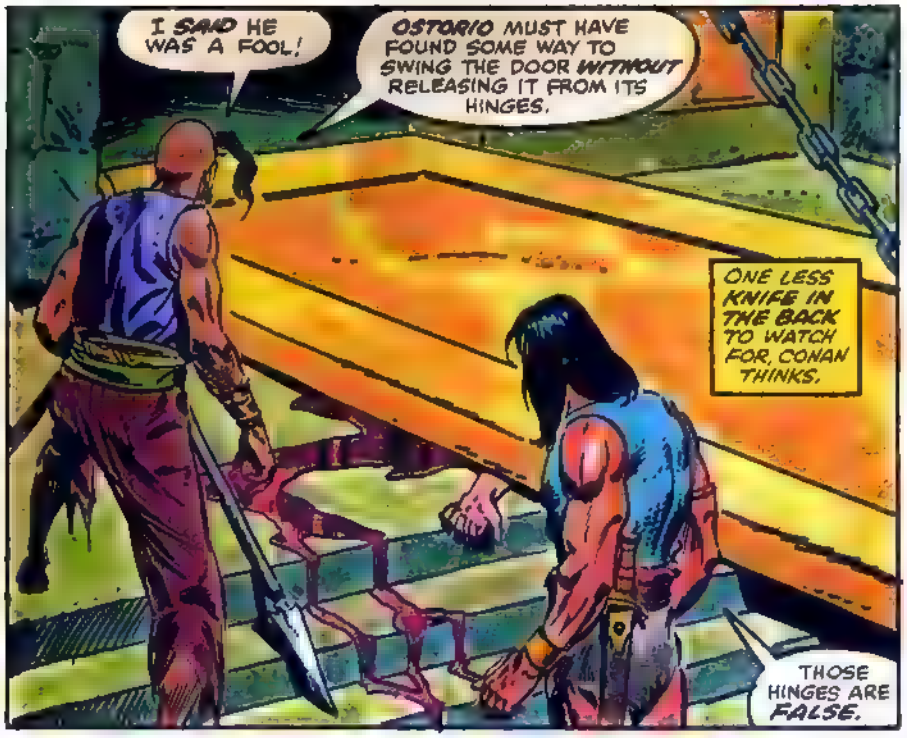
BUT, THE SIGHT AHEAD DRIVES **HUNGER** AND **FATIGUE** FROM THEIR MINDS...

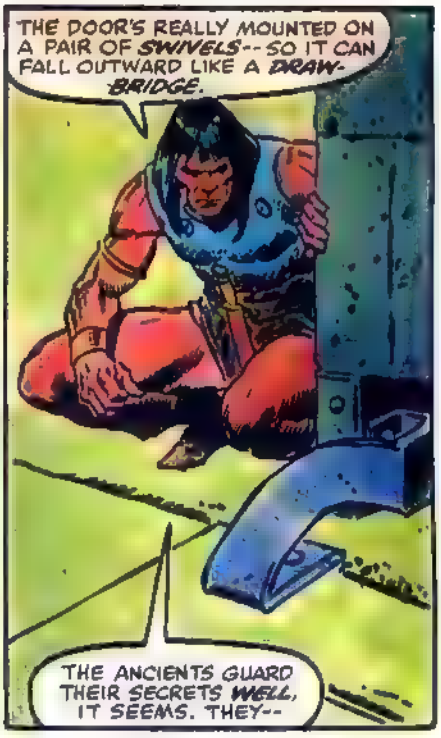
THE **TEMPLE** OF THE **BLOODSTAINED GOD!**

IT IS CARVED OF **SHEER ROCK**, ITS GREAT PORTIO FACING THEM... ITS GREAT **BRONZEN DOOR** GREEN WITH AGE.

WHAT **RACE** OR **CULTURE** IT REPRESENTS CONAN DOES NOT TRY TO GUESS, AS HE BEGINS TO EXAMINE THE **MAP** FOR A METHOD OF **OPENING** THAT DOOR.

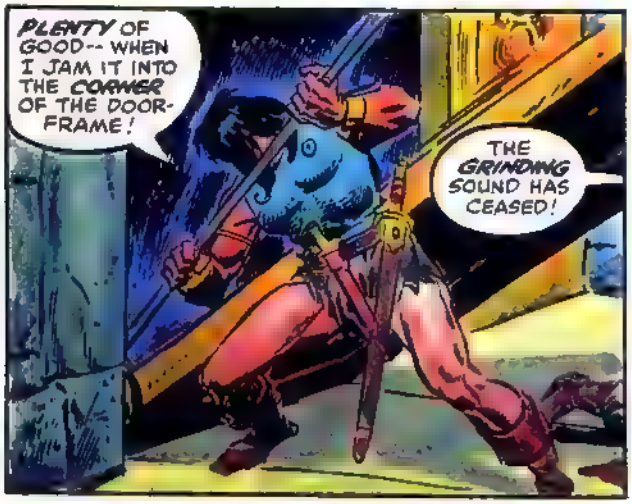
SASSAN, HOWEVER, IS IN NO MOOD FOR WAITING...
IT'S OURS!
THE TREASURE IS OURS!
GREEDY FOOL! OSTORIO LEFT A WARNING ON THE MARGIN OF THE MAP--
--SOMETHING ABOUT THE GOD'S TAKING HIS TOLL!
BAH! YOU'RE AN OLD WOMAN, ZYRAS! SEE?
I SIMPLY PUSHED THE RIGHT ORNAMENT--
--AND ALREADY, THE DOOR MOVES UNDER MY HANDS! IT--
EYES OF ASURA! NO!
NO
SASSAN'S CRY OF TRIUMPH CHANGES TO A SCREAM-- AS THE DOOR, A TON OF BRONZE, SWAYS OUTWARD AND FALLS CRASHING--
OOOOOOO
--SQUASHING THE IRANISTANI LIKE AN INSECT!

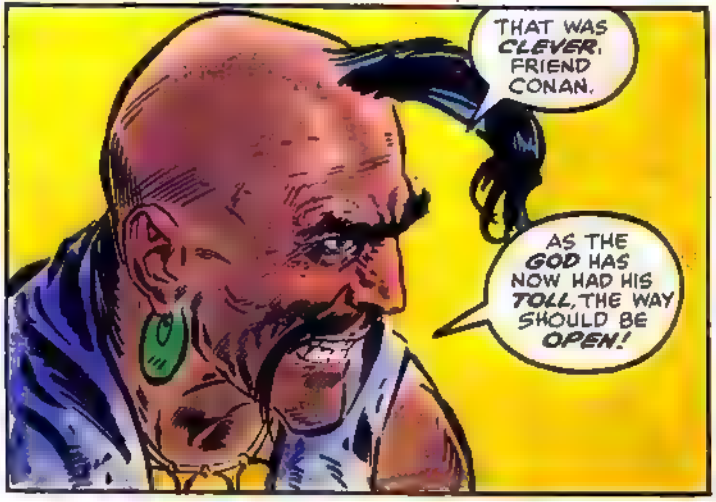

I SAID HE WAS A FOOL!
OSTORIO MUST HAVE FOUND SOME WAY TO SWING THE DOOR WITHOUT RELEASING IT FROM ITS HINGES.
ONE LESS KNIFE IN THE BACK TO WATCH FOR, CONAN THINKS.
THOSE HINGES ARE FALSE.


THE DOOR'S REALLY MOUNTED ON A PAIR OF SWIVELS-- SO IT CAN FALL OUTWARD LIKE A DRAW-BRIDGE.
THE ANCIENTS GUARD THEIR SECRETS WELL, IT SEEMS. THEY--

NOW WHAT THE DEVIL--?
THE DOOR! SOMEONE'S PULLING IT BACK UP!

BUT, WE'RE STILL GOING IN!
WHAT GOOD WILL THAT LANCE DO-- AGAINST A BRONZE DOOR AND A HEAVY CHAIN?


PLENTY OF GOOD-- WHEN I JAM IT INTO THE CORNER OF THE DOOR-FRAME!
THE GRINDING SOUND HAS CEASED!


THAT WAS CLEVER, FRIEND CONAN.
AS THE GOD HAS NOW HAD HIS TOLL, THE WAY SHOULD BE OPEN!

YOU'LL NEVER FIND ME FAR BEHIND YOU, ZYRAS.
HURRY, MAN-- BEFORE THAT LANCE SNAPS!
BUT CAREFUL-- WE MAY BE ENTERING A SERPENT'S LAIR!
MORE DEATH-TRICKS, YOU MEAN? AYE, I'LL BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR--
BY THE GODS!
CONAN'S FAR SHARPER EYES HAVE ALREADY SEEN IT, THERE IN THE HALF-GLOOM:
A BLAZE OF CRIMSON, WHICH SMITES THEIR EYES LIKE THE GLOW OF A SUNSET!
THE IDOL ITSELF IS A LITTLE BIGGER THAN LIFE-SIZE-- A MALIGNANT, TROLLISH FORM.
AND, TO ITS LEFT, THE FLOOR OF THE TEMPLE IS CLEFT FROM WALL TO WALL BY A CHASM SOME FIFTEEN FEET WIDE.
CROM AND YMIR! THAT'S A MONSTROUS THING, ALL RIGHT--
BUT ONE COULD BUY A KINGDOM WITH THOSE RUBIES!
TOO MUCH WEALTH, ZYRAS MUSES--

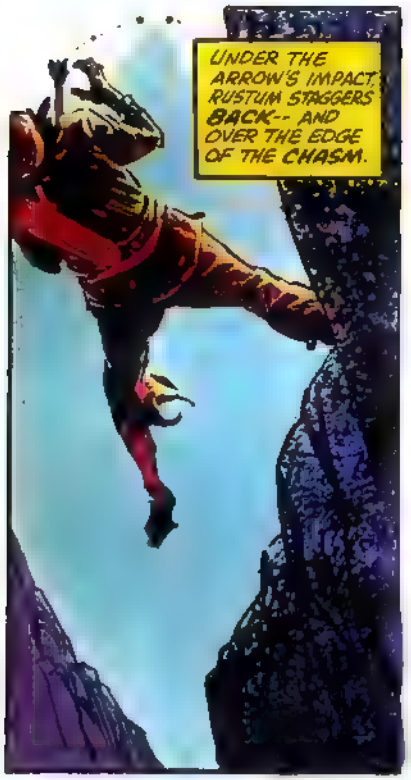
--TO SHARE WITH THIS LOUT OF A BARBARIAN!
BUT, NO MAN CAN DRAW A SWORD SILENTLY ENOUGH TO DECEIVE CONAN THE CIMMERIAN!
THUS, ZYRAS' BLADE SLICES AIR--. NOTHING MORE.
YOU TREACHEROUS DOG!
I'D HAVE SPLIT THIS LOOT WITH YOU, HALF TO EACH! BUT NOW--
NOW-- I WANT IT ALL!
I SHOULD HAVE SLAIN YOU-- BACK IN THE CITY OF THIEVES!
I'LL REMEDY THAT-- THIS DAY!
WORDLESSLY THEY FIGHT NOW-- FEET SCUFFING BLADES RASPING AND SINGING--
-- BACK AND FORTH BEFORE THE LEERING IDOL.

THEN, SUDDENLY-- CONAN'S FOOT SLIPS ON THE SMOOTH STONES--
HAH!
A SWORD POISES FOR A SPLIT SECOND, BEFORE CUTTING THE FRAGILE THREAD OF LIFE--
-- POISES, IN FACT, A SPLIT SECOND TOO LONG!
HANDS REACH OUT NOW-- FINGERS CLOSE ON FACE AND THROAT--
BUT IN A CONTEST OF STRENGTH-- EVEN THE BRIEFEST ONE--
--ZYRAS IS LIKE A STRAW BEFORE THE CYCLONE WINDS!
URGK
AND THE IDOL, AT LEAST FIGURATIVELY, IS BLOODSTAINED ONCE MORE.

SUPERSTITIOUS FEARS SCRAPE AT CONAN'S SPINE, AS HE EXAMINES THE GOD-IMAGE.
A KNIFE-TAP ASSURES HIM IT'S HOLLOW--
--BUT IT WILL STILL TAKE SOME LEVERAGE TO GET THE IDOL OFF ITS BASE WITHOUT--
STAND WHERE YOU ARE!
KERASPA!
AYE! AND DON'T REACH FOR YOUR KNIFE--OR THE FALLEN SWORD!
YOU THOUGHT I HAD RUN BACK TO MY VILLAGE--BUT I FOLLOWED YOU ALL RIGHT, WITH THE ONLY ONE OF MY MEN NOT WOUNDED.
HAD I KNOWN THIS TEMPLE CONTAINS SUCH TREASURE, I WOULD HAVE LOOTED IT LONG AGO, DESPITE THE BELIEFS OF MY PEOPLE.
RUSTUM! GET HIS SWORD AND DAGGER!
BUT, KERASPA--THIS IS WHO SAVED ME, BACK IN ARENJUN!
CAN HE NOT BE SPARED?
NAY! BE SILENT!
THE THIEF DIES!

IF YOU WON'T DO AS YOU'RE TOLD, THEN I'LL KILL HIM MYSELF!
HE SAVED MY LIFE! WHAT HAVE I EVER HAD FROM YOU BUT HARD TASKS AND SCANTY PAY?
I RENOUNCE MY ALLEGIANCE TO YOU, DOG!

ARRR
THEN HERE'S ONE MORE THING YOU'LL HAVE FROM ME--
DEATH!


UNDER THE ARROW'S IMPACT, RUSTUM STAGGERS BACK-- AND OVER THE EDGE OF THE CHASM.

HIS SCREAMS COME UP, FAINTER AND FAINTER... TILL THEY CAN NO LONGER BE HEARD.

THEN, BEFORE EVEN CONAN CAN MOVE, KERASPA HAS NOTCHED ANOTHER SHAFT.
HE IS ABOUT TO LOOSE IT AT THE TENSED CIMMERIAN--

--WHEN SUDDENLY, WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST WARNING--
--THE RUBY-CRUSTED GOD STEPS DOWN FROM ITS PEDESTAL--WITH A HEAVY METALLIC SOUND--

--AND TAKES ONE LONG STRIDE TOWARD THE KEZANKIAN!
STAY BACK!
BUT, KERASPA'S WORDS ARE OF NO MORE AVAIL--

--THAN HIS ARROWS!
NO! NO!!
IN THE NAME OF ASURA-- DON'T--!!
AAAAAA
AND NOW BLOCKING CONAN'S WAY TO THE EXIT, THE GOD LUMBERS PONDEROUSLY AT THE BARBARIAN--
--MOVING, FOR ALL ITS MASS, NEARLY AS QUICKLY AS A MAN.

UNLESS--
YES! THAT HEAVY BRAZIER AT HIS SIDE--!
NOW COME AHEAD, YOU LEERING GARGOYLE!
WE'LL SEE HOW MANY SACRIFICES YOU MAKE TO YOURSELF--
--WHEN I'VE SENT YOUR HEAD BACK TO HELL!
BUT, AMAZINGLY-- THOUGH HEADLESS, THE INHUMAN IDOL DOES NOT FALTER--!
CROM'S DEVILS!
I COULD FLEE-- BUT I DON'T THINK YOU NEED EYES AND EARS TO SENSE WHERE I'D BE!
CAN'T EVADE THOSE ARMS OF YOURS-- FOR LONG--

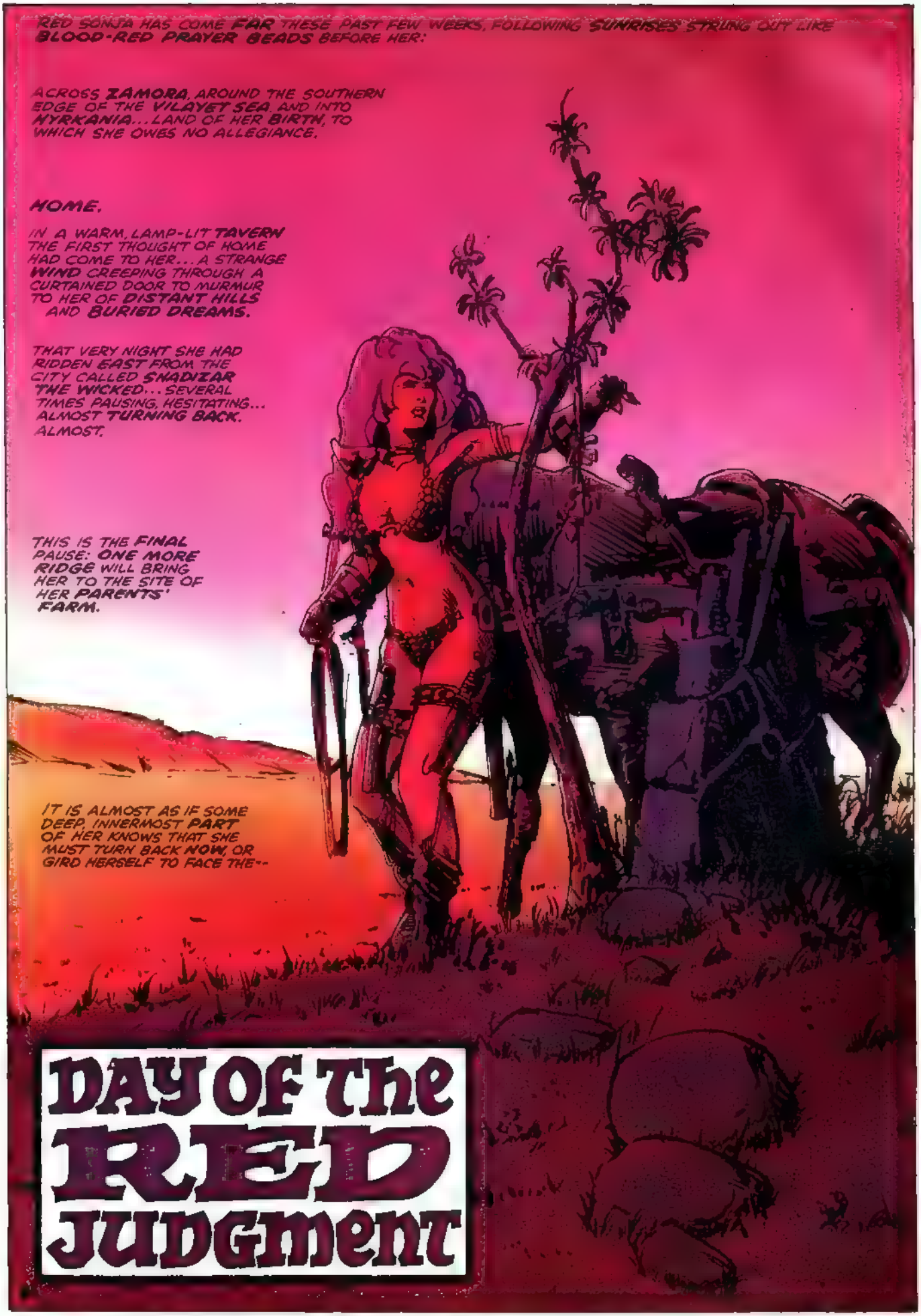
EARLIER, IT HAD CROSSED THE CIMMERIAN'S MIND THAT AGES AGO, SCREAMING VICTIMS HAD DOUBTLESS BEEN HURLED INTO THE YAWNING CHASM BY HIDEOUS PRIESTS, AS SACRIFICES TO THE BLOODSTAINED GOD.
NOW, TO HIS HORROR, CONAN REALIZES THAT THE ANCIENT PRIESTS DID NOT HAVE TO THROW THE GOD'S VICTIMS INTO THE GULF.
THE GOD HIMSELF MADE THOSE HUMAN SACRIFICES--
--AND CONAN SEEMS DESTINED TO BE THE NEXT TO DIE!

CONAN'S WELL-TIMED BLOW CATCHES THE DEITY BETWEEN STEPS, SO THAT HE IS ILL-BALANCED FOR THE MOMENT.
..SO I'LL COME TO YOU BEFORE YOU COME TO ME!
FOR A FRACTION OF A SECOND, THE MONSTROSITY TOTTERS ON CHASM'S EDGE...
THEN, IT TOO TOPPLES INTO THE YAWNING ABYSS!
CONAN CANNOT SEE THE CHASM'S BOTTOM.
NOR IS THERE A FINAL CRASH-- BUT ONLY THE DISTANT SOUND OF THE IDOL STRIKING THE SIDE OF THE CLIFF, AND BOUNCING OFF...
...THEN SILENCE.
THE CURSE OF THE BLOODSTAINED GOD IS ENDED... AND THE GOD WITH IT.
FOR ALL THE WEALTH THAT WENT INTO THE CHASM WITH THE IDOL, IT WAS NOT SO BAD A PRICE... FOR HIS OWN LIFE.
BESIDES, THERE ARE OTHER TREASURES, RIPE FOR THE TAKING...
AND SOME DAY, HE HOPES TO FIND ONE WITHOUT A CURSE ON IT!

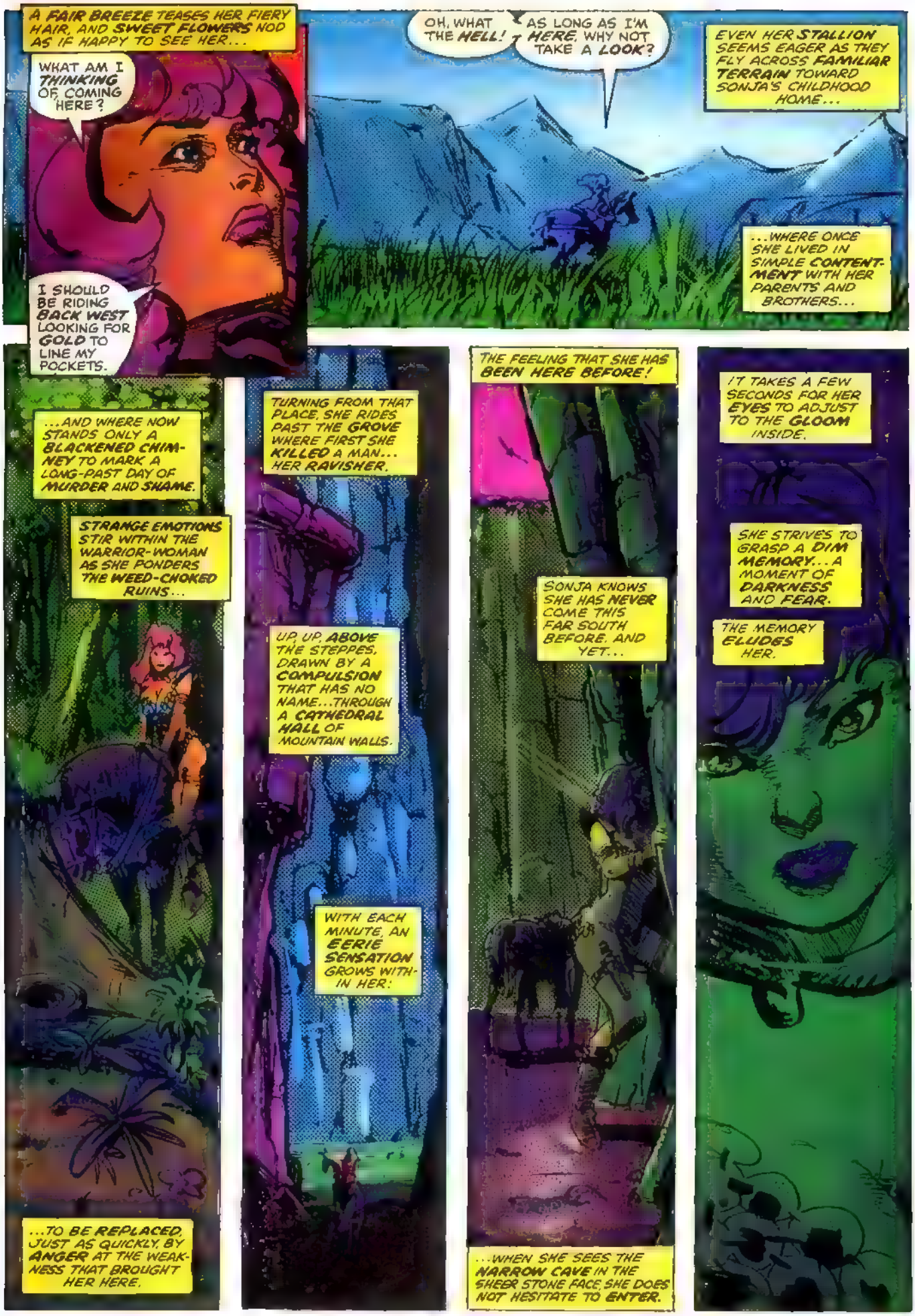
The SAVAGE SWORD of
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
JAVINA

"Know also, O prince, that in those selfsame days that Conan the Cimmerian did stalk the Hyborian kingdoms, one of the few swords worthy to cross with his was that of Red Sonja, warrior-woman out of majestic Hyrkania. Forced to flee her homeland because she spurned the advances of a king and slew him instead, she rode west across the Turanian Steppes and into the shadowed mists of legendry..."

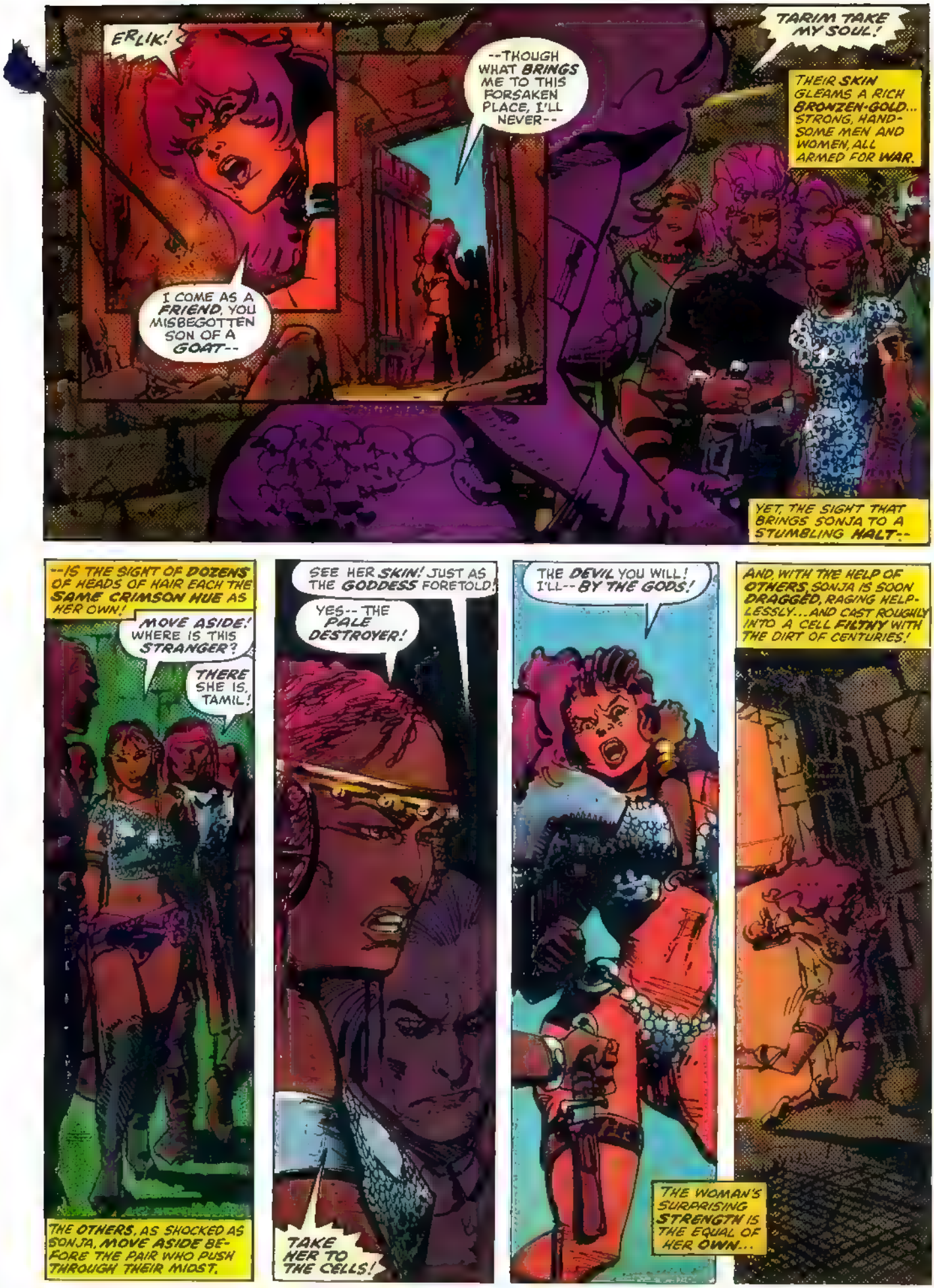
The Nemedian Chronicles.


RED SONJA HAS COME FAR THESE PAST FEW WEEKS, FOLLOWING SUNRISES STRUNG OUT LIKE BLOOD-RED PRAYER BEADS BEFORE HER:
ACROSS ZAMORA, AROUND THE SOUTHERN EDGE OF THE VILAYET SEA AND INTO NYRKANIA... LAND OF HER BIRTH, TO WHICH SHE OWES NO ALLEGIANCE.
HOME.
IN A WARM, LAMP-LIT TAVERN THE FIRST THOUGHT OF HOME HAD COME TO HER... A STRANGE WIND CREEPING THROUGH A CURTAINED DOOR TO MURMUR TO HER OF DISTANT HILLS AND BURIED DREAMS.
THAT VERY NIGHT SHE HAD RIDDEN EAST FROM THE CITY CALLED SHADIZAR THE WICKED... SEVERAL TIMES PAUSING, HESITATING... ALMOST TURNING BACK. ALMOST.
THIS IS THE FINAL PAUSE: ONE MORE RIDGE WILL BRING HER TO THE SITE OF HER PARENTS' FARM.
IT IS ALMOST AS IF SOME DEEP, INNERMOST PART OF HER KNOWS THAT SHE MUST TURN BACK NOW, OR GIRD HERSELF TO FACE THE--
DAY OF THE RED JUDGMENT

Script: ROY THOMAS and CHRISTY MARX Art: HOWARD CHAYKIN

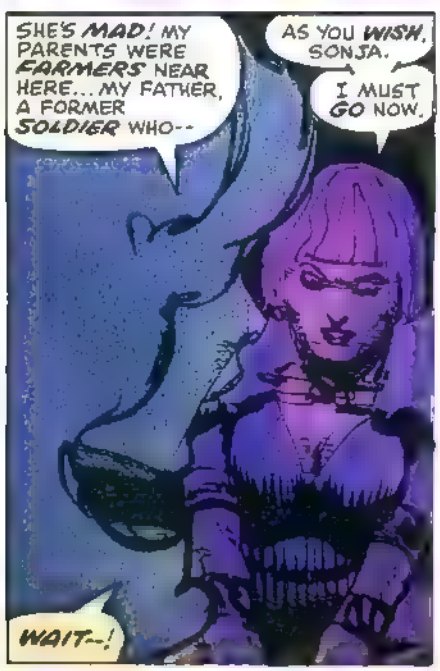

A FAIR BREEZE TEASES HER FIERY HAIR, AND SWEET FLOWERS NOD AS IF HAPPY TO SEE HER...
WHAT AM I THINKING OF, COMING HERE?
I SHOULD BE RIDING BACK WEST LOOKING FOR GOLD TO LINE MY POCKETS.
OH, WHAT THE HELL!
AS LONG AS I'M HERE, WHY NOT TAKE A LOOK?
EVEN HER STALLION SEEMS EAGER AS THEY FLY ACROSS FAMILIAR TERRAIN TOWARD SONJA'S CHILDHOOD HOME...
...WHERE ONCE SHE LIVED IN SIMPLE CONTENTMENT WITH HER PARENTS AND BROTHERS...
...AND WHERE NOW STANDS ONLY A BLACKENED CHIMNEY TO MARK A LONG-PAST DAY OF MURDER AND SHAME.
STRANGE EMOTIONS STIR WITHIN THE WARRIOR-WOMAN AS SHE PONDERS THE WEED-CHOKED RUINS...
...TO BE REPLACED, JUST AS QUICKLY, BY ANGER AT THE WEAKNESS THAT BROUGHT HER HERE.
TURNING FROM THAT PLACE, SHE RIDES PAST THE GROVE WHERE FIRST SHE KILLED A MAN... HER RAVISHER.
UP, UP, ABOVE THE STEPPES, DRAWN BY A COMPULSION THAT HAS NO NAME...THROUGH A CATHEDRAL HALL OF MOUNTAIN WALLS.
WITH EACH MINUTE, AN EERIE SENSATION GROWS WITHIN HER:
THE FEELING THAT SHE HAS BEEN HERE BEFORE!
SONJA KNOWS SHE HAS NEVER COME THIS FAR SOUTH BEFORE. AND YET...
...WHEN SHE SEES THE NARROW CAVE IN THE SHEER STONE FACE SHE DOES NOT HESITATE TO ENTER.
IT TAKES A FEW SECONDS FOR HER EYES TO ADJUST TO THE GLOOM INSIDE.
SHE STRIVES TO GRASP A DIM MEMORY... A MOMENT OF DARKNESS AND FEAR.
THE MEMORY ELUDES HER.

PERHAPS THAT IS WHAT DRIVES HER THROUGH THE BLACK CORRIDORS TOWARD A PATCH OF LIGHT.
OR...IS IT MERELY CURIOSITY?
TARIM'S BLOOD!...
I KNOW THIS PLACE...
BUT HOW?
THE CITY WAITS FOR HER.
THE GLORY IS ANCIENT AND WEARY...BUT THAT IT WAITS FOR HER. SHE HAS NO DOUBT.
SOMEWHERE WITHIN ITS BARREN WALLS IS THE SOURCE OF THE WHISPERING WIND THAT CALLED HER HERE.
THE SUBTLE SPELL, HOWEVER, IS SHATTERED BY THE SCUFFLING SOUND BEHIND HER...
WHO'S THERE--?
DAMN! I'M JUMPY AS A DEER HEARING THE HUNTER'S HORN.
SHE MOVES OUT OF THE CAVE, INTO THE HOT SHAFT OF SUN THAT SHOWS HER UP CLEARLY AGAINST THE GRANITE CLIFFS.
A BIT TOO CLEARLY.

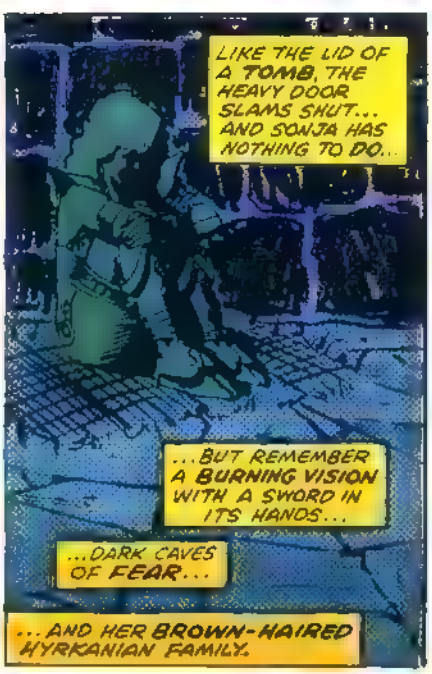

ERLIK!
I COME AS A FRIEND, YOU MISBEGOTTEN SON OF A GOAT--
--THOUGH WHAT BRINGS ME TO THIS FORSAKEN PLACE, I'LL NEVER--
TARIM TAKE MY SOUL!
THEIR SKIN GLEAMS A RICH BRONZEN-GOLD... STRONG, HANDSOME MEN AND WOMEN, ALL ARMED FOR WAR.
YET, THE SIGHT THAT BRINGS SONJA TO A STUMBLING HALT--
--IS THE SIGHT OF DOZENS OF HEADS OF HAIR EACH THE SAME CRIMSON HUE AS HER OWN!
MOVE ASIDE! WHERE IS THIS STRANGER?
THERE SHE IS, TAMIL!
THE OTHERS, AS SHOCKED AS SONJA, MOVE ASIDE BEFORE THE PAIR WHO PUSH THROUGH THEIR MIDST.
SEE HER SKIN! JUST AS THE GODDESS FORETOLD!
YES-- THE PALE DESTROYER!
TAKE HER TO THE CELLS!
THE DEVIL YOU WILL! I'LL-- BY THE GODS!
THE WOMAN'S SURPRISING STRENGTH IS THE EQUAL OF HER OWN...
AND, WITH THE HELP OF OTHERS, SONJA IS SOON DRAGGED, RAGING HELPLESSLY... AND CAST ROUGHLY INTO A CELL FILTHY WITH THE DIRT OF CENTURIES!

HERE, SHE PACES OUT LONG HOURS, TILL AT LAST THE DOOR OPENS...
STAND ASIDE!
TAMIL HERSELF GAVE ME PERMISSION TO ENTER AND SPEAK WITH HER.
YES-- ALONG WITH A WARNING TO WATCH YOUR WORDS.
REMEMBER, WE WILL BE LISTENING!
MY NAME IS ZORA.
SO? SHOULD I KNOW YOU?
NO! I MEAN... I BROUGHT YOU WINE AND BREAD.
HOW ARE YOU CALLED?
RED SONJA. WHY DO YOU LOOK DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS?
THAT IS BECAUSE OF MY HAIR; I AM FORCED TO CUT IT OFF THIS WAY, AS A PUNISHMENT.
WHAT DID YOU DO?
PLEASE... EAT. I AM CURIOUS: HOW DID YOU GET BY THE DROMMACH?
GOOD BREAD. WHAT'S A DROM-MACH?
FLESH-EATING MAN-BEASTS THAT LIVE IN THE CAVES THAT HONEY-COMB THIS MOUNTAIN.
AH, THAT EXPLAINS THE SOUND I HEARD BEFORE.
GOOD WINE, TOO. MY THANKS, ZORA.
I OWE YOU THIS MUCH, AT LEAST... BEFORE YOU DIE.
WHAT??
WHAT KIND OF MURDERERS ARE YOU PEOPLE? I'VE DONE NOTHING!
IT'S NOT WHAT YOU WOULD DO... BUT WHAT YOU ARE.
WE CALL OURSELVES THE FAVORED.
THE RED GODDESS, WHO CREATED US, FAVORED US WITH HAIR THE COLOR OF BLOOD...
...AND GAVE US STRENGTH AND SKILL WITH WEAPONS, FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE THAT WE SHOULD SLAY THE DROMMACH!
THEY BREED LIKE VERMIN, AND WOULD LONG SINCE HAVE SPREAD BEYOND THIS RIFT AND ACROSS THE WORLD, IF NOT FOR OUR UNENDING BATTLE WITH THEM.
WHAT HAS ALL THIS TO DO WITH MY BEING KILLED?
IN THE EARLY DAYS, THE RED GODDESS FORETOLD...

"...THAT, IN THE DAYS OF OUR DOOM, A PALE DESTROYER WOULD ARISE FROM WITHIN...AND LEAD US TO FINAL DEATH AND EVERLASTING GLORY.
"THEN YOU WERE BORN, WITH YOUR MOONPALE SKIN; YOUR MOTHER CONCEALED THE SECRET WITH SKIN DYES FOR MORE THAN A YEAR.
"IN TIME, HOWEVER, THE FAVORED DISCOVERED HER DECEIT; YOUR PARENTS WERE SLAIN, AND YOU WERE TAKEN TO THE CAVES...LEFT FOR THE DROMMACH TO DEVOUR.
"YET, SOMEHOW, YOU LIVED...AND YOU HAVE RETURNED!
"SO NOW WE MUST DESTROY YOU...BEFORE YOU DESTROY US.
"SO TAMIL SAYS."


SHE'S MAD! MY PARENTS WERE FARMERS NEAR HERE...MY FATHER, A FORMER SOLDIER WHO--
AS YOU WISH, SONJA.
I MUST GO NOW.
WAIT--!

WHAT IS YOUR INTEREST IN THIS? WHY DO YOU BOTHER WITH FOOD AND STORIES?
ZORA! BE WARNED!
I...MUST GO. I WILL SEE YOU...TOMORROW.


LIKE THE LID OF A TOMB, THE HEAVY DOOR SLAMS SHUT...AND SONJA HAS NOTHING TO DO..
...BUT REMEMBER A BURNING VISION WITH A SWORD IN ITS HANDS...
...DARK CAVES OF FEAR...
...AND HER BROWN-HAIRED HYRKANIAN FAMILY.

BEFORE LONG, HOWEVER, HER REVERIE IS RUDELY INTERRUPTED...
CHORLI! HURRY WITH THOSE WEIGHTS!
RAGE ALL YOU WANT TO NOW, SHE-DEVIL!
TAMIL AWAITS YOU IN THE TEMPLE.
THE FAVORED LINE THE WAY, GAWKING AS SIGHTSEERS ARE WONT TO DO...
...BE IT AT A HANGING, OR A CRUCIFIXION.
SONJA DECIDES THAT, PROPHECY OR NO PROPHECY, THESE CUTTHROATS ARE NO KIN OF HERS.
THE GRAVEN IMAGE THAT TOWERS OVER THE ALTAR INSIDE THE TEMPLE IS CARVED OF DARK RED JASPER.
YET, WHAT SONJA SEES IS ONLY THAT IT PRECISELY RESEMBLES--
THE VISION!
STILL YOUR BLASPHEMOUS TONGUE BEFORE THE RED GODDESS!
I'LL NOT BE STILL! THIS "GODDESS" OF YOURS APPEARED TO ME ONCE IN A VISION!
SHE TOUCHED ME WITH THAT VERY SWORD SHE HOLDS!
THEN LET IT BE PROVEN!
I, TAMIL, OFFER THIS SACRIFICE TO THEE, GODDESS OF THE FAVORED!
DRINK THIS HOLY BLOOD-- AND, IF YONDER PALE WENCH BE THY SERVANT-- THEN SPEAK, AND TELL US SO!
SHE STANDS CONDEMNED.
STRIKE OFF HER HEAD!

NO!
ZORA!? WHAT..?
I'LL NOT LET YOU DO THIS!
I AM TO BLAME! LET ME DIE INSTEAD!
SO, OUR SUSPICIONS OF HER WERE CORRECT!
YES, TAMIL. THE PALE ONE WOULD SURELY HAVE DIED IN HER CELL IF NOT FOR ZORA.
VERY WELL, THEN! OUR MERCY IS WITHDRAWN FROM YOU, ZORA.
KILL THEM BOTH!
A PLAGUE ON YOUR MERCY!
TO MY SIDE, ZORA--
TOGETHER, WE'LL SEND MANY SOULS TO ONE HELL-PIT OR ANOTHER, BEFORE WE FALL!
SLAY THE PAGANS!

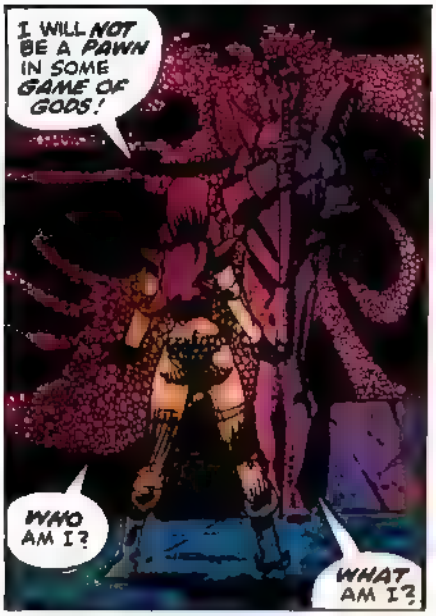
TO ARMS! TO ARMS!
THEN, EVEN AS MYRIAD WARRIORS CLOSE IN UPON THE HOPELESSLY OUTNUMBERED PAIR...
THE DROMMACH ARE UPON US!

INSTANTLY FORGETTING ALL OTHER QUARRELS, THE FAVORED RUSH TO MEET THEIR AGE-OLD ENEMY...
...AS THE APISH CREATURES CALLED DROMMACH POUR, THICK AS LOCUSTS, FROM THE CAVE-MOUTHS, THEIR INHUMAN WAR-CRIES RENDING THE AIR!
DEATH!
DEATH AND GLORY!

I MUST GO! NO MATTER WHAT THEY HAVE DONE, I CANNOT ABANDON MY PEOPLE IN THIS HOUR.
WE WILL DIE TODAY, PERHAPS. COME WITH ME, SONJA-- FIGHT WITH ME!
SONJA?
BUT, RED SONJA STANDS TRANSFIXED BY THE IDOL LOOMING OVER HER.

AND, WAITING NO LONGER FOR A REPLY, ZORA SPINS--
--RUSHING TO JOIN THE CLASHING OF STEEL AND THE SCREAMS OF THE DYING.

HEAR ME, GODDESS OR VISION OR WHATEVER YOU BE--
UNTIL THIS DAY, I WAS CONTENT WITH MY LIFE!
I SERVED NOTHING AND NO ONE BUT MYSELF!



THEN, ABOVE THE SNORTS FROM OUTSIDE, A VOICE IS HEARD...

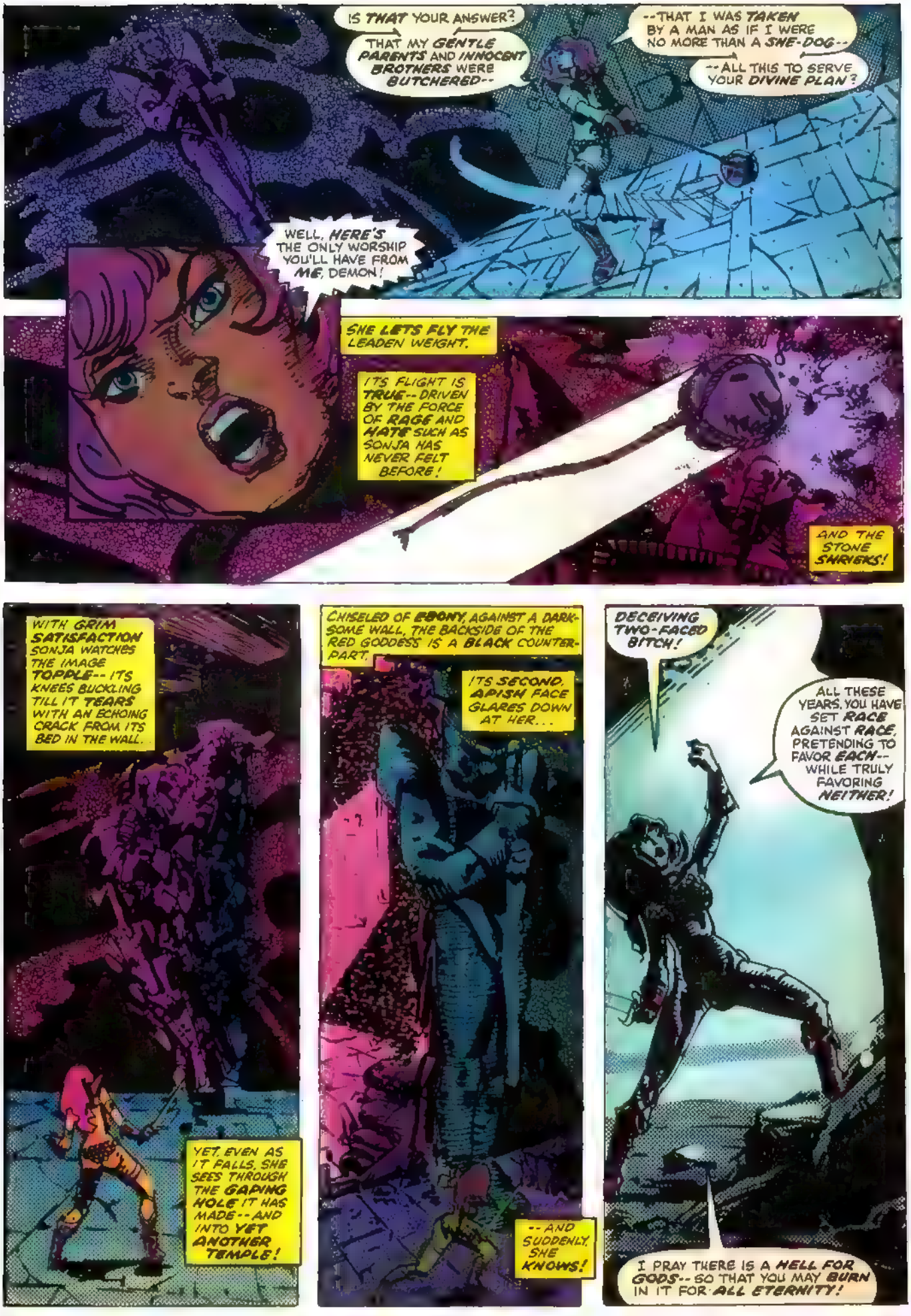
"SPEAK NOT SO TO ME, RED SONJA, LEST I GRIND YOU BENEATH MY SACRED HEEL!

"DO YOU REFUSE TO UNDERSTAND THE CALL THAT BROUGHT YOU HERE? IT WAS MY VOICE...CALLING YOU HOME!

"KNOW THIS: YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN WHAT NOW YOU ARE.

"I DID NOT GIVE YOU POWER; I MERELY REMOVED YOUR SHACKLES.

"IT WAS MY WILL THAT KEPT YOU WEAK AND WEAPONLESS IN THE LAND OF HUMANS... MY WILL THAT KEPT THE NATIVE SKILL FROM YOUR HANDS...
"...MY WILL THAT YOU SHOULD SEE THOSE YOU LOVED DIE, AND FEEL YOUR BODY ABUSED BY ROUGH MEN.
"YOU ARE MY WEAPON, TEMPERED WITH WAITING, ANGER, AND DENIAL... AND AT LAST FORGED WITH FIRE AND PAIN.
"GO TO YOUR PEOPLE! LEAD THEM TO GLORY! SMITE YOUR ENEMIES!"


IS THAT YOUR ANSWER?
THAT MY GENTLE PARENTS AND INNOCENT BROTHERS WERE BUTCHERED--
--THAT I WAS TAKEN BY A MAN AS IF I WERE NO MORE THAN A SHE-DOG--
--ALL THIS TO SERVE YOUR DIVINE PLAN?
WELL, HERE'S THE ONLY WORSHIP YOU'LL HAVE FROM ME, DEMON!
SHE LETS FLY THE LEADEN WEIGHT.
ITS FLIGHT IS TRUE-- DRIVEN BY THE FORCE OF RAGE AND HATE SUCH AS SONJA HAS NEVER FELT BEFORE!
AND THE STONE SHRIEKS!
WITH GRIM SATISFACTION SONJA WATCHES THE IMAGE TOPPLE-- ITS KNEES BUCKLING TILL IT TEARS WITH AN ECHOING CRACK FROM ITS BED IN THE WALL.
YET, EVEN AS IT FALLS, SHE SEES THROUGH THE GAPING HOLE IT HAS MADE-- AND INTO YET ANOTHER TEMPLE!
CHISELED OF EBONY, AGAINST A DARKSOME WALL, THE BACKSIDE OF THE RED GODDESS IS A BLACK COUNTERPART.
ITS SECOND, APISH FACE GLARES DOWN AT HER...
--AND SUDDENLY, SHE KNOWS!
DECEIVING TWO-FACED BITCH!
ALL THESE YEARS, YOU HAVE SET RACE AGAINST RACE, PRETENDING TO FAVOR EACH-- WHILE TRULY FAVORING NEITHER!
I PRAY THERE IS A HELL FOR GODS-- SO THAT YOU MAY BURN IN IT FOR ALL ETERNITY!

HER FURIOUS CURSE RINGS THROUGHOUT THE TEMPLE, AMID THE CRACK OF ROCK AND THE FINE FALL OF DUST.
BUT, THE DEATH-THROES OF THE GODDESS ARE NOT COMPLETE... AS WALLS AND ROOF SAG OMINOUSLY...
...AND THE VERY FLOOR BEGINS TO BUCKLE UNDER SONJA'S FEET!
JUST LIKE A GODDESS!
CAN'T EVEN DIE QUIETLY, LIKE ANY-ONE ELSE!
THE TEMPLE COL-LAPSES UPON ITSELF IN ONE FINAL, TERRIBLE HEAVE...!
GO ON-- BURY YOURSELF! TAKE YOUR VILE SECRET WITH YOU -- AND GOOD RIDDANCE!
I AM FREE OF YOU!
FREE? EVEN AS SHE SPEAKS, SONJA KNOWS SHE LIES TO HERSELF... FOR, HER ONLY PATH OUT OF THE CAVERNS LIES THROUGH THE MIDST OF THE BATTLE.
BELOW, THE FAVORED ARE A BELEAGUERED ISLAND IN A FROTHING SEA OF DARK-PELTED FOES...FIGHTING WITH BERSERKER DESPERATION AGAINST SEEMINGLY HOPELESS ODDS.
AND SOMEWHERE AMONG THEM IS A TALL WOMAN WITH SHORT-CROPPED HAIR...

ZORA! KEEP YOUR HEAD AND NECK TOGETHER!
I'M COMING!
AS SHE LEAPS HEADLONG INTO THE DROMMACH'S MIDST, RED SONJA'S SWORD CARVES A SWATH OF GORE AND GUTS IN SPLATTERING ARCS--!
FIGHT YOU RED-HAIRED DOGS!
THE PALE DESTROYER HAS COME! WE ARE SAVED!
I AM NO ONE'S SAVIOR--
--ESPECIALLY YOURS AND TAMIL'S!
SO, LOOK TO YOUR OWN SK--
ZORA!
I OWE YOU THIS RESCUE, GIRL!
SONJA! YOU'VE SAVED MY LIFE!
I KNEW YOU WOULD CHANGE YOUR MIND!
OH NO! I'M JUST PASSING THROUGH-- ON MY WAY BACK TO THE REAL WORLD--

BUT, IF I HAVE TO KILL EVERY LAST DROMMACH TO GET THERE--
-- THEN BY ERLIK, I WILL!
RED-HAIRED WARRIORS DIE BY THE DOZENS NOW, AND EVERY STEP FORWARD IS TAKEN OVER A SCORE OF WRITHING DROMMACH BODIES...

...TILL AT LAST THE GROUND IS LITTERED WITH THE DEAD...
...AND ONLY RED SONJA SEEMS TO SURVIVE, LEANING IN SICKENED WEARINESS UPON HER NOTCHED BLADE.

THEN, ZORA'S LOW MOAN RECALLS HER TO ALERTNESS...
THE-- DAY OF JUDGMENT-- HAS COME! ALL-- MY FAULT...
LET ME DIE! LET THE GODDESS... TAKE ME...!
STOP IT! YOUR IDOL WASN'T WORTH ONE DROP OF YOUR BLOOD...
...AND YOU'VE SHED PLENTY.

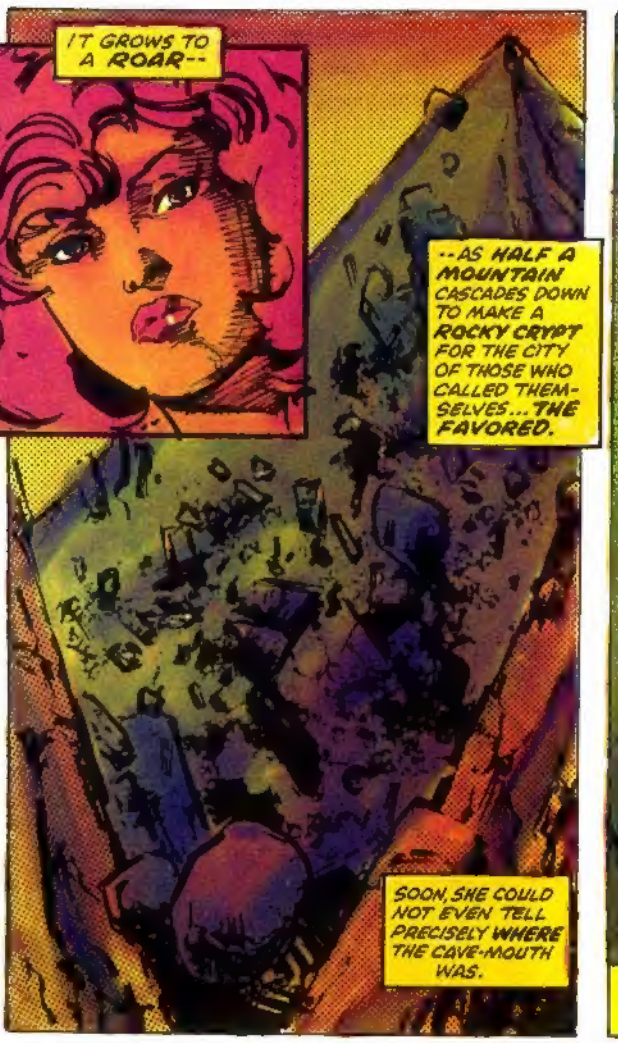
BUT, YOU'LL LIVE-- WITH SOME HELP, AND--
MY BACK! YOU MUST WEIGH... TWELVE STONES...!

YOU'LL-- FORGET IN TIME! I'LL SHOW YOU... THE WORLD, ZORA.
CITIES... GOLD... REAL WINE, NOT BLOOD, AND...
OH, TO HELL WITH IT!

SOMEHOW, SHE REACHES THE CAVE BEYOND.
THOUGH SHE LONGS TO REST UPON THE COOL STONES, SHE FORCES HERSELF TIRELESSLY ON... HER EARS STRAINING FOR THE SLIGHTEST SCUFFLE OF BESTIAL FEET.
THERE IS NONE.

OUTSIDE, LONG SHADOWS FILL THE NARROW CLEFT.
EVEN AS SHE WHISTLES TO HER NEARBY STEED, SHE HEARS A SOUND LIKE A GIANT, GRUMBLING DEEP IN HIS THROAT.

IT GROWS TO A ROAR--


--AS HALF A MOUNTAIN CASCADES DOWN TO MAKE A ROCKY CRYPT FOR THE CITY OF THOSE WHO CALLED THEMSELVES... THE FAVORED.
SOON, SHE COULD NOT EVEN TELL PRECISELY WHERE THE CAVE-MOUTH WAS.

IT'LL BE DARK SOON. SHE'LL NEED WARMTH... AND HER WOUNDS WILL WANT TENDING.
GODS, WHAT I'D GIVE FOR A COLD TANKARD OF SPICED ALE!
SONJA HAS MANY QUESTIONS FOR THE WOMAN SHE CARRIES... IF SHE LIVES.

SHE WONDERS ABOUT TAMIL'S WORDS IN THE TEMPLE... ABOUT ZORA'S UNSPEAKABLE PUNISHMENT... AND MOST OF ALL, ABOUT HER LINEAGE AND THE WORDS OF THE NAMELESS RED GODDESS.
BUT, QUESTIONS WILL HAVE TO WAIT... PERHAPS FOREVER.
SOUTHWESTWARD ACROSS THE HYRKANIAN STEPPES, THE YELLOW FLOWERS NOD SAGELY TO THE WHISPERING WIND.
FOR THEM, IT IS JUST ANOTHER DAY...!

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

RED SONJA™

SHE-DEVIL WITH A SWORD